

# INSTITUTE OF COGNITIVE SCIENCE



*Cinnamon Bidwell,  
Interim Faculty Director*

## FROM THE INTERIM FACULTY DIRECTOR

Friends,

I hope the spring semester is finding you well and that you've had moments to enjoy both the energy of campus and the promise of longer days ahead. It was wonderful to close out the year together at our Annual Membership Event in December. Thank you, Danielle and team, for organizing this warm and joyful gathering! It was a nice reminder of how much this community thrives on connection, curiosity, and shared purpose.

This spring, our biggest highlight is welcoming Alba back. We are deeply grateful she had meaningful time with her family, and we are delighted to have her return to the rhythm of the Institute. Her presence, insight, and leadership make a difference to all of us in ways both large and small.

Over the past several months, we've also had meaningful opportunities to reflect on how our work connects beyond the university. Last fall's ICS Research Informing Policy panel, featuring Profs Marie Banich, Sidney D'Mello, Bill Penuel, and me, highlighted how researchers can make their work policy-relevant and engage effectively in policy conversations. The discussion underscored a shared commitment across our community to advancing health, education, equity, safety, and innovation through research that informs real-world decisions.

We are also pleased to celebrate a major milestone for Prof Jennifer Jacobs, who was promoted to Full Research Professor in January, a well-deserved recognition of her leadership and impact at ICS and across the field more broadly.

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Our spring poster session was another bright moment, especially given the very wintery weather that day. We had a record number of posters spanning a remarkable range of labs and disciplines. Thank you to everyone who presented, attended, and helped create such an engaged and welcoming atmosphere – truly a warm crowd on a cold day.

Looking ahead, we are excited to be launching a new faculty search focused on AI and The Mind. Many thanks to Prof Jim Martin for chairing the search committee, and to committee members Profs Rosie Cowell, Quentin Biddy, and Theodora Chaspari. We've engaged partners across multiple departments, including linguistics, education, computer science, psychology and neuroscience, and information science, and we're energized by the strong interest and possibilities already taking shape.

As always, thank you for supporting my time as Interim Director and thank you for all you do to make the Institute of Cognitive Science such a vibrant, collaborative, and forward-looking community. Spring always feels like a season of recalibration! Here's to navigating the next stretch with curiosity, care, and just enough breeze to keep us moving forward.

Warmly,  
Cinnamon

# Welcome Back, Alba!

Dear ICS,

It's great to be back after my parental leave! I have had a busy, productive, and fulfilling time catching up on everything that happened in the months I was gone - one of which is our first foray into having a biannual newsletter (as opposed to just annual!). We hope this will be a great way to catch up on everything happening across ICS more consistently. Heartfelt thanks go out to the ICS team who managed everything so smoothly while I was taking time with my family and our new little one - special thanks to Cinnamon, Cat, and Danielle who helmed the ICS ship smoothly through the end of 2025 and beginning of 2026! And of course, thank you to all of ICS for your grace and patience during my leave - it was wonderful to have the time to get (mostly!) settled into our new family routine.

I am excited to be back to help support the ongoing ICS faculty search, close out our fiscal year, and start to plan for an exciting and vibrant AY26-27! I look forward to seeing you all through the end of our colloquium season and hope to see you all at our final one on April 17 for our annual end-of-the-year gathering and recognition of our student graduations.

As always, don't hesitate to reach out - I'd love to catch up!

Alba



Welcome back, Alba!  
It's wonderful to have you with us again.  
Congratulations to the whole Tuninetti  
family on their newest addition!

(L-R) Romi (3), Martin, Alba, and Esti (5 months)

# Meet Our New Fellows

**Dr. Heather Demarest**  
**Associate Professor, Department of Philosophy**

Dr. Demarest (PhD, Rutgers, 2013) was born and raised in Boulder and graduated from CU with degrees in both philosophy (summa) and physics (summa). She earned a BPhil in philosophy from Oxford and a PhD in philosophy from Rutgers.



Her graduate work was on the laws of nature. After four years as an Assistant Professor at the University of Oklahoma, she is very happy to be back home in Boulder! She works on metaphysical implications of current physics. She is also the director of the Committee on the History and Philosophy of Science.

Most recently, her work is on the way in which special and general relativity inform philosophical notions of time, personal identity, and causation. She has also done research on the retention of undergraduate women in philosophy. She spends her free time hiking and biking with her husband Zak and their three kiddos.



**Dr. Youngki Hong**  
**Assistant Professor, Department of Psychology and Neuroscience**

Dr. Hong received his PhD from the University of California, Santa Barbara, in 2021.

His research examines how people perceive others and process information about them. He draws on theories and methods from social psychology, cognitive neuroscience, and machine learning to study stereotyping and prejudice based on visual and non-visual cues, low-level perceptual processes in social perception, and interventions to reduce bias and discrimination.

# ICS Administration and Staff

**Interim Faculty Director Cinnamon Bidwell**

**Associate Director Alba Tuninetti**

**Administrative, Organization, and Academic Team (AO&A)**

**Danielle Franklin**, Operations Manager

**Yvette Cullum**, Administrative Assistant III

**James Dods**, Administrative Assistant II

**Avery Stewart**, Student Assistant

**Finance Team**

**Cat Latzer**, Finance Director

**Lakshmi Muralidharan**, Sr. Grant Manager

**Kim Sandoval**, Grant Manager

**Grant Krick**, Grant Manger

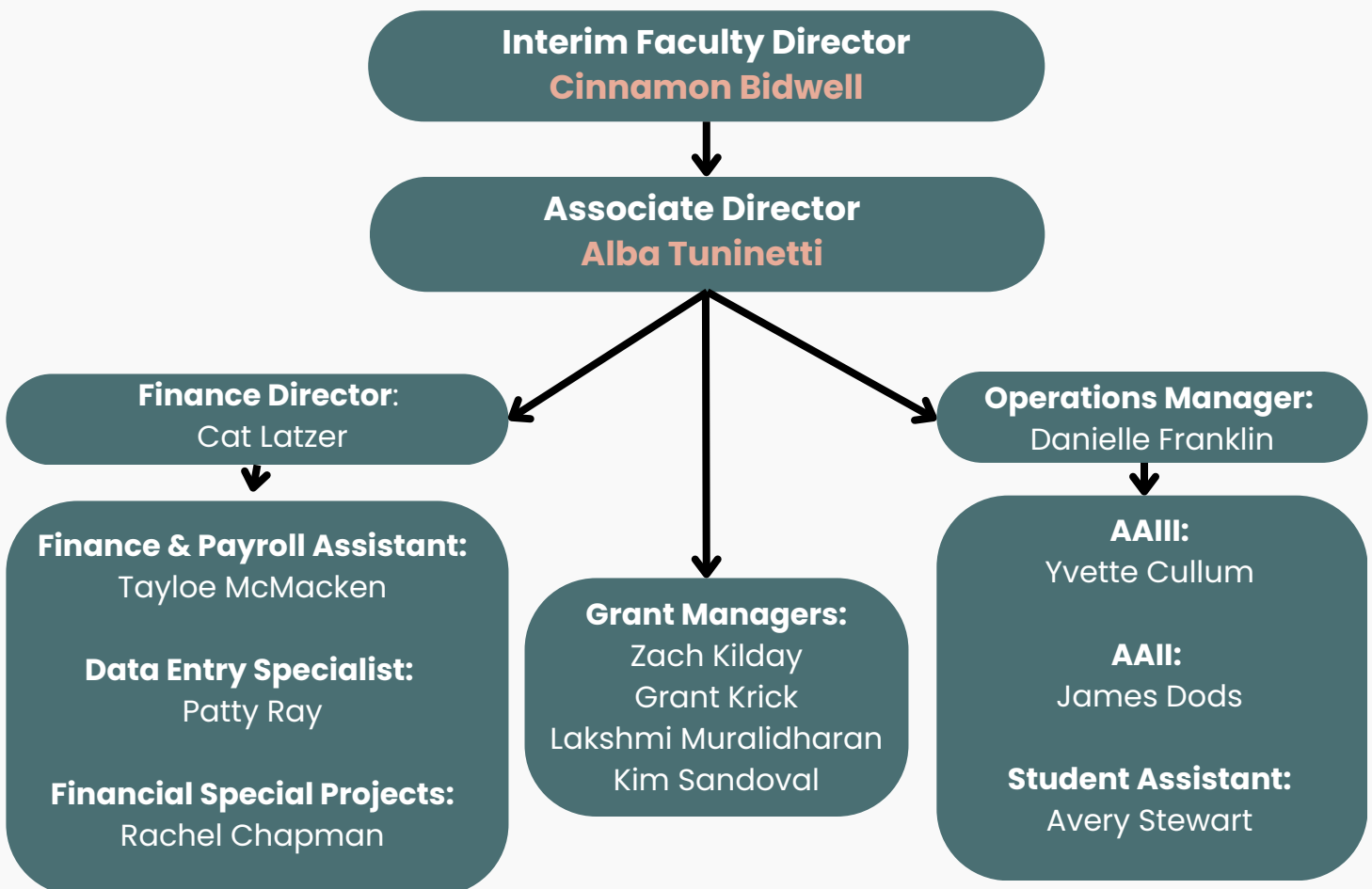
**Zach Kilday**, Grant Manager

**Taylor McMacken**, Finance & Payroll Asst.

**Patty Ray**, Data Entry Specialist

**Rachel Chapman**, Financial Special Projects

## Administration and Staff Organizational Chart



# Staff Spotlight



## Tayloe McMacken Finance and Payroll Assistant

Tayloe has worked at CU Boulder since September 2024. We spoke with her about what led her to ICS, the most interesting parts of her role, and what life looks like outside of work.

### **Q: How did you get into the field of finance/payroll?**

**A:** Sprouts hired me away from Target because I used to work in the cash office. Their back-up Administrative Coordinator was moving away soon, and they wanted me as a replacement because I was already familiar with handling safes and registers. However, the Administrative Coordinator had a family emergency and went on a sudden leave that became a resignation. I was able to step into her place and that started my journey of working in HR, finance, payroll, and data entry!

### **Q: What led you to the University of Colorado?**

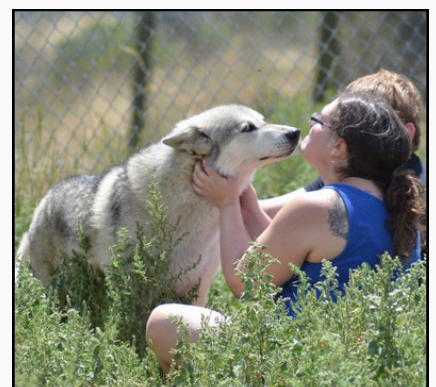
**A:** I have a couple of friends that graduated from CU Boulder and always raved about how good it was. I also joined a D&D group that had two professors in it! After hearing them talk about work, and doing some of my own research, I thought it would be a good fit. I started keeping an eye out for job openings that matched my experience, and that's how I came to apply to the ICS.

### **Q: What is something interesting about your job most people don't know?**

**A:** No two days are alike even if I'm doing something I've done before! After my training I've found that the policies and processes are always evolving, so I still feel like I'm learning new things and changing how I work.

### **Q: What is your favorite part of your job?**

**A:** I really like doing Journal Entries. I enjoy when all the lines balance out correctly. Typing out the header is a challenge because it has a very low character limit, and I feel proud when I get it to work out just right!



Tayloe and her partner, Zach, enjoying their time at the W.O.L.F Sanctuary.

**Q: What is your favorite part of working for ICS?**

**A:** Our weekly meetings! It's fun catching up with what everyone got up to over the weekend and hearing the new stories people have when we meet up on Wednesday. I also enjoy our back office Monday meeting and getting to catch up on everyone's crafting projects!

**Q: What do you like to do in your free time to unwind?**

**A:** Buying yarn! Technically it's for crocheting, but I definitely buy yarn faster than I can finish projects. I also enjoy reading and playing video games. And watching horror movies! I love seeing Patty's [Patty Ray, ICS Data Entry Specialist] office with all her horror memorabilia when we're on Zoom call together.

**Q: What is your favorite activity outside of work?**

**A:** Finding new places to hike with my dog and boyfriend. Just last week we took Logan out to the Garden of the Gods and he loved it! We also saw someone taking their pet emu for a walk around the park too!

**Q: How do you get into your work mindset?**

**A:** I start with getting a cup of tea, pulling up my favorite horror story podcast for background noise, and then I get started on my emails!



Tayloe alongside her beloved feline, Tiernan.

**Q: What does an average day look like for you?**

**A:** I start my day with emails, then I move on to checking Asana rooms. There's been a lot of student hires recently, so I spend extra time in the Student Hire room to follow up on any tasks there or making sure the welcome emails are getting sent out. Wednesdays are APF days, so I work on writing those up, checking on the ones waiting on signatures in Docusign, and sending the signed ones to the HRSC. And I try to dedicate time after lunch and at the end of the day to checking emails as well. Also, depending on the week, my job changes a lot!

# Research in the Spotlight



**Alaa Ahmed: ICS Fellow, Mechanical Engineering**

- [U.S. New and World Report Article, "Brain Chemical Provides a 'Pep in You Step,' Experiment Shows"](#)



**Ronald Benoit: ICS Faculty, Psychology and Neuroscience**

- [U.S. News & World Report Article, "Research Shows Imagining Positive Encounters Shapes Real-Life Feelings"](#)



**Cinnamon Bidwell: ICS Faculty Interim Director and Psychology and Neuroscience**

- [WSAZ3 News Segment "Researchers are working to develop a breathalyzer that detects THC levels in high drivers"](#)



**Bill Penuel: ICS Distinguished Professor and School of Education**

- [New York Times Article, "Funding Cuts Are a 'Gut Punch' for STEM Education Researchers"](#)

To view more articles and news segments featuring ICS faculty and fellows, [click here](#).

# Faculty & Fellow Awards



Theodora Chaspari, ICS Faculty, was recognized with the Graduate School's Exceptional Graduate Faculty Mentor Award! This award celebrates outstanding faculty who serve as trusted mentors to graduate students. Nominations are driven by students, who submit the nomination letter and letters of support. Congratulations, Theodora!

Bhuvana Narasimhan, ICS Fellow, received a 2026 BFA (Boulder Faculty Assembly) Excellence Award in Research, Scholarly, and Creative Work. This award celebrates faculty contributions of the highest quality. The campus created the BFA Excellence Awards in the early 1980s to recognize outstanding work and concerted effort in advancing the mission of the university and the academy at large. Congratulations, Bhuvana!



Nicholas Reinholtz, ICS Fellow, received the Provost's Faculty Achievement Award, one of the campus' highest faculty honors. This award recognizes and celebrates the research, scholarship, and creative work of CU Boulder's faculty members. Congratulations, Nicholas!

## Promotions & Re-appointments

### CONGRATULATIONS!



Peter Foltz was re-appointed to his position as a Research Professor



Jennifer Jacobs, Associate Research Professor, was promoted to Research Professor

# ICS Centers' Updates

## CHMM (Center for Healthy Mind and Mood)

The Center for Healthy Mind and Mood is pioneering a transformative approach that shifts the paradigm of depression science to foster healthy mood in young people. The Center focuses on the transdisciplinary discovery of the nature, prevention, and treatment of youth depression, achieved by a team of diverse scientists, students, educators, campus leaders, and community stakeholders working together to produce integrative research with significant public health impact. Our three initiatives focus on (1) scientific discovery, (2) research translation to practice, and (3) education & outreach. The Center is led by Dr. Roselinde Kaiser, a clinical psychologist, neuroscientist, and national leader in the field of mood disorders and mental health.

This year we launched the Voice program, a participatory research program with a focus on understanding mental health, stress, and resilience through the eyes of adolescents, families, and educators. The goal of Voice is to spark new research directions and co-design projects with youth. The Center is building relationships with schools and community partners to amplify youth voice in depression science.

[Join the listserv](#) to stay up to date on programs and research opportunities!

### Publications

Peterson, E. C., Jones, J., Barnes-Horowitz, S., Moser, A. D., Stern, E., Coccaro, A., Neilson, C., Janes, A. C., Friedman, N. P., & Kaiser, R. H. (2026). Executive Dysfunction and Depression Risk in Adolescence: Functional-MRI Analysis of Transient Network States During a Working Memory Task. *Clinical Psychological Science*, 0(0). <https://doi.org/10.1177/21677026251393199>

Coccaro, A.\*, Cheng, Z.\*, Ruzic, L.\*, Moser, A. D.\*, Jones, J.\*, Peterson, E. C.\*, Stern, E. F.\*, Friedman, N. P., & Kaiser, R. H. (2025). Neurocognitive Biotypes of Risk and Resilience for Mood Disorders in Adolescents: Insights From Behavioral and Graph-Theoretic Network Markers. *Biological psychiatry global open science*, 5(6), 100563. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bpsgos.2025.100563>

Cheng, Z.\*, Moser, A. D.\*, Jones, J.\*, Schneck, C. D., Miklowitz, D. J., Dillon, D. G., & Kaiser, R. H. (2025). Reinforcement Learning and Decision Making in Depression and Adolescents and Young Adults: Insights from a New Model of the Probabilistic Reward Task. *Computational psychiatry*, 9(1). DOI: [10.5334/cpsy.147](https://doi.org/10.5334/cpsy.147)

## CUChange (Center for Health & Science, Genes & Environment)

- Graduate student Luiza Rosa published a first author paper, “Therapeutically Motivated Cannabis Use for Anxiety: Daily and Longitudinal Reductions Vary Between Flower and Edible Products”
- CUChange Co-director Angela Bryan was featured on the *Freakonomics* podcast, while Co-director Cinnamon Bidwell was featured on *Science Friday*
- CUChange graduate student Margy Chen was selected for an Excellence in Behavioral Science Award from the Student Social Interest Group at the Society of Behavioral Medicine
- The LOTUS study was featured on Denver’s NBC 9News
- CUChange PRA Ellie Sundali published a first author paper, "Heart rate response to cannabis in active older adults"
- CUChange postdoc Jonny Lisano has an exciting forthcoming paper that was just accepted for publication, "Physical Activity Level Moderates Cannabis Associated Reductions in Negative Affect in Anxious Individuals"

## iHUB (inquiryHub)

The inquiryHub team continued to support and study the implementation of high-quality instructional materials (HQIM) in science while expanding into AI-focused instructional materials. We secured two new NSF awards — Co-Design and Piloting HQIM - and renewed iSAT, continuing our work on developing AI literacy materials grounded in a storyline approach. We also joined a new Spencer Foundation initiative to reimagine the future of R&D, drawing on our strengths in convening to explore more connected systems across research, practice, and policy. In partnership with the Colorado Department of Education, we’ve been hosting free Science at its Peak workshops to help teachers and school leaders implement the Colorado Academic Standards for Science.

Teachers and school leaders gathering at a Science at its Peak workshop.



We also extended our work internationally, leading a professional learning institute in Costa Rica for teachers, administrators, and government leaders. During the three-day workshop, participants co-developed a draft storyline for a sustainability unit.



iHUB in Costa Rica!  
(L-R) Bill Penuel, Tammy Sumner,  
Kate Henson, and Greg Benedis-Grab

## **iSAT (NSF National AI Institute for Student-AI Teaming)**

The NSF National AI Institute for Student-AI Teaming (iSAT) is an interdisciplinary research community dedicated to transforming classrooms into more effective and engaging learning environments. We team with students and teachers to develop the next generation of collaborative learning environments and AI Partners that support both small group and whole class learning. Over the past months, iSAT has made progress in four major areas of our work in the first year of Phase II: AI Partners, Trust in AI, GenAI curriculum, and the Nexus HUB.

In terms of our in-house AI Partners, which are part of our cross-strand research convergence, we are making enhancements to our most mature AI partner, the Community Builder (CoBi), and the Jigsaw Interactive Agent (JIA) is transitioning into the Supportive Partner for Agency, Reflection, and Knowledge-building (SPARK), which provides real-time, mixed-initiative small group scaffolding to support student groups on learning tasks. In parallel, we are developing two new AI partners: the Connection Finder which aims to help teachers in surfacing student ideas, interests, and meaning-making during small group discussions and a meta-partner to support teachers and students in implementing or AI-enhanced storylining curricula.

Another central focus in Phase II is on trust and transparency. We are working on a Trust in AI Framework, identifying computational metrics to evaluate LLM trustworthiness, and designing "under-the-hood" learning environments that make AI reasoning more transparent and explainable. Finally, these technological advancements are actively grounded in real-world contexts by scaling our AI-enhanced curriculum units and advancing the science of student-AI teaming.

Most notably, we are developing a new "Generative AI and Art" storyline unit with educators. Opening with an anchoring phenomenon about an AI-generated state art show submission, the subsequent backlash, and questions around AI art, this unit equips students with essential AI literacy while we deepen partnerships with schools, districts, and other communities of practice to ensure our tools generalize responsibly across contexts.

Building on these advancements, the Nexus HUB translates the science of Student–AI Teaming into responsible, real-world impact that empowers K–12 education while engaging broader academic and industry communities. This quarter, we convened several K–12 Working Group co-design sessions with district leaders to surface the practical constraints that shape a district's ability to adopt AI-enhanced learning materials. In response to these insights, we developed a flexible "Dual-Route" engagement strategy to serve as an accessible on-ramp to our AI-enhanced curriculum units. The top-down route adapts our Responsible Innovation Framework to support district leaders in ethically navigating AI procurement and coordinating strategic, district-wide AI implementation. Conversely, the bottom-up route drives scalable classroom adoption by unbundling our core technologies to create agile, modular learning experiences. Additionally, we continued to expand our institute-wide outreach capacity by collaborating closely with each research Strand, actively aligning partnership needs, facilitating engagement with external research communities, and supporting several additional workshop submissions.

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## ICS Colloquia Update

**Please join us in person or over Zoom to hear from visiting researchers and our own!  
Snacks are provided!**

- **Find our current colloquia schedule [here](#) and on the left side of the homepage on the ICS website.**
- **Past colloquia recordings are archived for your viewing [here](#) on the ICS website.**

**Zoom: <https://cuboulder.zoom.us/j/98256300067?from=addon>  
Meeting ID: 982 5630 0067**

# New Graduates

**Fall 2025**

## **Interdisciplinary Undergraduate Certificate in Cognitive Science**

**Chloe Circenis** - Linguistics

**Andrew Karaki** - Speech, Language, and Hearing Sciences

**Tava Reese** - Linguistics

**Philippa Zolla** - Psychology & Neuroscience

## **Interdisciplinary Graduate Certificate in Cognitive Science**

**Bagyasree Sudharan** - Computer Science

CONGRATULATIONS,  
**GRADUATES!**

## Student Programs

**Let friends and colleagues know about our programs at ICS!**

We encourage all Undergraduate and Graduate students to APPLY if interested in the ICS certificate and degree program(s).

Step-by-step process is outlined in the online links:

- o [Graduate Programs](#)
- o [Undergraduate Programs](#)

**All CU Boulder students are welcome to apply!**

Please email if you have questions:

Email: [ICSPrograms@colorado.edu](mailto:ICSPrograms@colorado.edu)

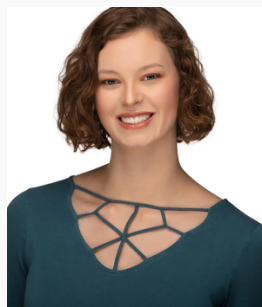
# Student Research and Travel Awards

## Research



**Min-Chun (Allen) Hsiao**  
**Fall 2025, LING**

Research Award: \$800 to fund dissertation research on *Beyond Contextual Guesswork: Modeling Denominal Verb Argument Structure through Analogical Generalization and Pragmatic Optimization and Explaining English denominal verb-argument structure through communicative efficiency*



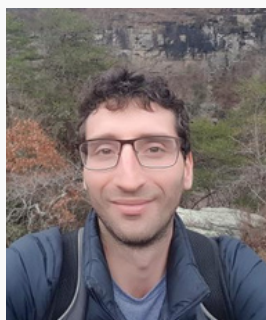
**Olivia Stine**  
**Fall 2025, PSYC**

Research Award: \$800 to fund thesis research on *Investigating Suppression of Negatively-Valenced Stimuli Using Simulated Real-World Approach*



**Shih-Yu Ma**  
**Fall 2025, CS**

Research Award: \$800 to fund dissertation research on *Sensing Frustration, Timing Help: Affective On-Device Tutoring*



**Thiago Roque**  
**Fall 2025, ATLAS**

Research Award: \$520 to fund dissertation research on *Longitudinal Synchronous Multi-Brain Imaging Study on Student Music*



**Alex Barone**  
**Spring 2026, P&N**

Research Award: \$800 to fund thesis research on *Semantic Scaffolding of Episodic Thinking in Aphantasia and Hyperphantasia*



**Zachary Kaufman,  
Spring 2026, CS**

Research Award: \$800 to fund dissertation research on *Exploring Patient’s AI use in Their Mental Health Treatment*



**Sophia Mehdizadeh  
Spring 2026, ATLAS**

Research Award: \$800 to fund dissertation research on *Neural Mechanisms of Music Appreciation*

**Travel**



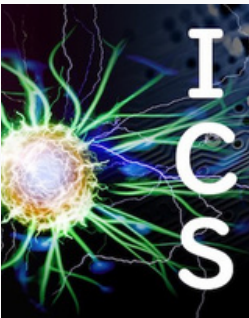
**Emily Doherty  
Fall 2025, CS**

Travel Award: \$1000 to present her paper on *Crisis Response 2.0: Multimodal Modeling of Core Team- Reasoning Facets in the Age of Gen AI* at the CHI 2026 conference.



**Min-Chun (Allen)  
Hsiao**

**Summer 2025, LING**  
Travel Award: \$1000 to present his paper on *Beyond Contextual Guesswork: Modeling Denominal Verb Argument Structure through Analogical Generalization and Pragmatic Optimization and Explaining English denominal verb-argument structure through communicative efficiency* at 2026 LSA (Linguistic Society of America) Annual Meeting.

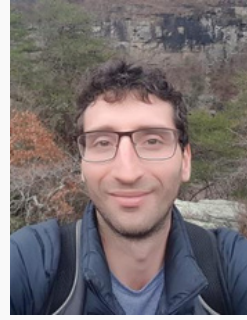


**Alex Barone  
Spring 2026, P&N**

Travel Award: \$1000 to present his poster on *Boosting the impact of episodic simulations on decisions via semantic scaffolding?* at the CNS (Cognitive Neuroscience Society) 2026 Annual Meeting



**Tyler Grimes**  
**Spring 2026, ATLAS**  
 Travel Award: \$1000 to present his paper on *Self-referential Mediaecologies: Practice-based Inquiries into Affective Renderings* at the xCoAx - Computation, Communication, Aesthetics, and X Conference



**Thiago Roque**  
**Spring 2026, ATLAS**  
 Travel Award: \$644 to present his paper on *Boosting the impact of episodic simulations on decisions via semantic scaffolding?* at the 20<sup>th</sup> International Conference on Tangible, Embedded and Embodied Interaction (TEI'26) Conference



## Need CU logo/branding info?

Check out the links below!

[Write & Design on Brand](#)

[Brand Toolkit](#)

[Branding Guidance for Sponsored Projects](#)

## Need Proposal Writing Help?

RIO offers proposal development resources that add value to even seasoned proposals, including review and editing, graphics support, strategic consultation, and tailored assistance. These services enhance competitiveness and streamline the development process.

Click the links below to view these resources.

[Overview of Proposal Development Services](#)

A direct contact is listed on this page for those wanting to discuss options for an upcoming submission.

[Proposal Writing Support](#)